

1.4.1998, powers to plan, approve and implement schemes under Sub-Mission have been delegated to the States. States can also take up schemes/projects to provide safe drinking water under PMGY-RDW and powers to approve schemes/projects have been delegated to State Governments. During 2000-2001, Rs. 78.37 crore under ARWSP and Rs. 58.74 crore under RDW component of PMGY were released. For the current year, Rs. 43.86 crore under ARWSP and Rs. 9.40 crore under RDW component of PMGY have been released as 1st installment.

Keeping in view the problem of arsenic contamination in ground water in the State, as a special case, instead of 20%, 50% of ARWSP funds have been allowed to be spent on tackling arsenic contamination in 24 North Parganas District. As per information received from the Government of West Bengal, after 1.4.1998, during 2000-2001, State Government has sanctioned two projects—one project in North 24 Parganas District at a total cost of Rs. 124.82 crore covering 318 habitations under ARWSP and another project in Malda district at a total cost of Rs. 43.00 crore covering 367 habitations under PMGY—Rural Drinking Water, for tackling arsenic problem in drinking water.

National conference of Panchayat Raj State Ministers

1167. SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN:

SHRI N.R. DASARI:

Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a national conference of the Panchayat Raj State Ministers was held in Delhi recently; and

(b) if so, the details of the subjects discussed therein and the outcome thereof?

[1st August 2001]

RAJYA SABHA

THE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU): (a) Yes, Sir. A Conference of State Ministers of Panchayati Raj was held on 11.07.2001 at New Delhi.

(b) The subjects discussed and broad consensus arrived at in the conference are given in the Statement (See below)

Statement

Major recommendations of the Conference of State Ministers of Panchayati Raj held on 11.07.2001 at New Delhi

The following resolutions/recommendations on strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions were adopted unanimously by the State Ministers of Panchayati Raj present in the Conference.

(i) Elections—

- It was agreed that since the holding of Panchayat elections every 5 years is mandatory, State Governments/Union Territory Administration shall ensure that elections are held with the same regularity with which Parliament and Assembly elections are held.
- States/UTs should refrain from approaching Law Courts for postponement of elections. While the adequacy of the legal provisions pertaining to Panchayat elections can be examined, the State Governments have to, in the first instance, ensure regular holding of elections.
- It was desirable of Panchayat elections to be held on non-party basis.
- The process of delimitation of constituencies and reservation of seats for SCs/STs and women should be settled well in advance, for giving sufficient opportunity for settling disputes, if any, on these issues.
- If Panchayat elections are not held on time, the Planning Commission/Government of India can issue directions for withholding funds under Central Schemes/Centrally Sponsored Schemes.

(ii) Devolution of funds, functions and functionaries upon PRIs—

- It was agreed that States/UTs would devolve functions upon PRIs in respect of the subjects listed in the XI schedule and issue detailed executive instructions devolving specific and substantial executive powers upon each tier of Panchayats by 31.3.2002.
- A Task Force comprising senior officers of the Ministry of Rural Development and of the State Governments will be set up at the earliest to operationalise administrative decentralization of funds, functions and functionaries with regard to the subjects in the Constitution, so that functional and financial devolution is completed by 31st March, 2002.
- Incentives should be extended to the Panchayats by the State Governments by way of grants-in-aids for their better performance as regards raising their own resources.
- Panchayats may be given untied funds to enable them to select development work according to their needs.

(iii) Constitution of DPCs—

- The Conference, taking note of the poor progress in setting up of District Planning Committees in most of the States/UTs, recommended that these be constituted by the end of 2001.
- It was agreed that the practice of appointing Minister-in-charge of district as Chairperson of DPC should be discontinued and that the Chairman of District Panchayat ought to be the Chairperson of the DPC.

(iv) Strengthening of Gram Sabha—

- In order to accelerate the emergence of Gram Sabhas as bodies to whom the PRIs are accountable, the powers and functions of Gram Sabha should be spelt out in detail articulating their role as planners, decision-makers, and auditors.
- It was agreed that the Gram Sabha meeting should be held at least four times in a year. Instead of holding the Gram Sabha on a fixed day, it was suggested to hold Gram Sabhas within a span of 30 days from the pre-determined dates so that concerned officers are present to respond to questions and concerns.

(v) Transparency and Accountability—

It was resolved that the following 4-point strategy for strengthening of Gram Sabha and effective implementation of different Rural Development Schemes will be implemented in letter and spirit:—

- Awareness through print and electronic media, street plays and training to the elected Panchayat representatives;
- Participation of the community in the preparation of need based action plans, their execution and monitoring;
- Transparency by displaying all the relevant information on a Bill Board regarding estimates, availability of funds and expenditure on the works taken up by the Panchayats, making available all relevant records for inspection by the public, providing photocopies of documents, on demand on payment of nominal charges and prescribing well-defined methods for selection of beneficiaries;
- Social Audit should have binding legal outcomes so as to curb corruption and misutilisation of funds. The Gram Sabha should be empowered legally for Social Audit.

(vi) State Control over PRIs—

- The scope of State Government intervention and control over PRIs should be minimized. If there is any specific complaint against any Panchayat, it should be referred to a body similar to the Ombudsman in Kerala.

(vii) Parallel Bodies constituted by States—

- The Conference decried the increasing tendency to set up parallel bodies. If at all any such bodies are to be set up, they should work under the supervision of the Panchayats and the Gram Sabha.
- The Conference recommended that instead of setting up parallel bodies, States should implement the existing provision in Panchayat laws for Sub-Committees on different subjects and train Panchayat Members for this purpose.
- Panchayats/Gram Sabhas should be empowered to supervise and monitor the work of NGOs working in the rural areas.

(viii) The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996-[PESA—1996]

- It was agreed that action would be taken to ensure legislation or amendment of relevant Acts/Rules, to bring them in conformity with the provisions of the PESA, 1996, latest by 31.3.2002.

Amount sanctioned to voluntary organisations by CAPART

†1168. DR. MAHESH CHANDRA SHARMA: Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) -the names of the voluntary organisations that have been sanctioned amounts by CAPART for rural development during 1999-2000 and 2000-2001; and

(b) the details of projects concerning the public programmes and the rural technology development programmes undertaken by these organisations?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI SUBHASH MAHARIA):

(a) and (b) Information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Making readymade garments sector viable

1169. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA: Will the Minister of TEXTILES be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that 83 lakh units of readymade garments employing almost 184 lakh workers are on the verge of closure due to imports from Bangladesh, China and Sri Lanka and excise hike;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action Government propose to take to make the readymade garments sector viable so as to save lakhs of workers engaged in the industry from losing their jobs?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.